

to a time when the Temple priests gave King David the sacred bread for him and his companions, which broke the Law of Moses. And Jesus quotes from the Prophet Hosea saying God desires mercy not sacrifice. In that exchange Jesus challenges their understanding of the scripture as they mercilessly condemn the innocent disciples and fail to demonstrate the love of God and neighbor.

*What do you think Jesus wanted to convey when He compared His authority over the Sabbath to that of the prophet, priests and king when He said, "For the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!"?*

*36 This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel--that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*

*- Acts 10:36 NLT*

*What is the significance that Jesus is "Lord of All" regarding our following any of the "laws" we find in scripture?*

Legalism is not confined to following Old Testament Law. The New Testament also contains commands for the believer to follow. Some of those commands define for us what constitutes sin and idolatry. Don't call legalism what God has specifically called sin or idolatry. We aren't looking for ways to excuse our sinful behavior by claiming freedom from the Law. We follow God's instructions on how to live because of our love for God, so that we can be near Him and reflect Him to the world around us.

### **WRAP-UP**

Holiness isn't about earning God's approval by following rules; it's about receiving His grace, which is a free gift made possible through Jesus. People can fall into legalism by trying to measure their worth through performance, but true sanctification comes from the work of the Holy Spirit as believers choose to draw near to God and turn from sin. Jesus criticized outward displays of righteousness that hide inward corruption, emphasizing that genuine holiness flows from a transformed heart, not appearances. Rather than striving for perfection to gain acceptance, believers are called to live obediently out of love for God, motivated by a desire for relationship with Him and guided by His mercy, truth, and authority.

### **MEMORY VERSE**

*3 How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? - Galatians 3:3 NLT*

### **Challenge –**

*Spend time expressing your love and gratitude to God. Let the incredible gift of unconditional love fuel your desire to walk in holiness and draw nearer to God, then rely on the Holy Spirit to give you the ability & power to do so.*

## **The More Excellent Way- Week 2 Sanctification not Legalism**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In our current series we are examining sanctification and holiness. And although we should seek to live holy lives and be set apart for God, we can mistakenly equate that with "following all the rules" which can become a form of legalism. Holiness is not about meeting an obligation to "be good". The bad news is that you can't be good enough to make yourself holy or to earn salvation, because it isn't a reward. But the good news is that salvation is a free gift of grace, an invitation into God's presence and a relationship with Him through Jesus. But sin presents a barrier between us and God. Living in a way that is pure, set apart from sin, and pleasing to God requires the work of the Holy Spirit. So, let's see what we can do to cooperate with the Spirit as He purifies us and sanctifies us so that we may draw near to the throne of grace.

### **Ice Breaker**

How good are you at Simon Says? [Would you like to give it a try and see how long you last?](#)

### **Key Passage**

*27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. - Matthew 23:27-28 NIV*

### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

#### **1. The Gospel of Grace**

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV*

When the bible talks about grace it equates it with a gift of God. Because grace, by definition, is unearned. It isn't a reward or a payment; it is a free gift. God even provides us with the faith we need to accept His gift of salvation. But we still have a choice to make and unless we are willing to lay our life down in exchange for eternal life as a child of God, there is nothing else we can do that will make us holy and able to be in relationship with God.

*How do you feel when you find that you aren't able to earn God's love and acceptance? Are you humbled, relieved, or is it difficult to receive something as a gift you didn't deserve?*

The church in Galatia also struggled with legalism. They were so accustomed to being evaluated by how well they observed the Law of Moses that they were deceived by Satan into applying legalism to their new-found faith in Jesus. They believed that by their ability to follow those laws, they were blessed and grew spiritually through earning and deserving. But the truth is, under grace, we are blessed and grow spiritually by believing and receiving.

*2 Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. 3 How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? 4 Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it? 5 I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ. - Galatians 3:2-5 NLT*

*Reflect on how your accomplishments in life have been used to evaluate you. Did you strive to achieve good grades in school to gain approval of your parents and teachers? Have you pursued a job or career because it is prestigious? Have you felt guilt or shame when you failed to meet your expectations or the expectations of others?*

Our culture rewards and encourages us to do more and be more by our own efforts. We sometimes want to apply that same standard of accomplishment to our spiritual worthiness or holiness. The unfortunate fallout of this is that we judge ourselves as unworthy when our own efforts fall short (and we will fall short of perfection in trying to follow the law). When we sin, rather than feeling convicted and seeking God for forgiveness, we feel condemned and hide from God's judgment. And when that happens, Satan wins.

## **2. Our Motivation for Holiness**

*5 "Everything they [Scribes and Pharisees] do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels ... 23 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law--justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. Matthew 23:5, 23 NLT*

You may have heard people say, "We aren't under the Law, so we don't have to worry about keeping it." But Jesus taught that we should obey the Law of Moses. In Matthew chapter 23 He basically said, "do as the religious leaders say, not as they do".

*What did Jesus say was the Pharisee's motivation for following the Law? Orthodox Jews still wear those boxes and tassels Jesus referred to. What are some of the more overt displays of Christianity that we might be tempted to do by our pride or "doing it all for show"?*

*27 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs--beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. 28 Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness. - Matthew 23:27-28 NLT*

*2 It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. - Isaiah 59:2 NLT*

*6 So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. 7 But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. - 1 John 1:6-7 NLT*

The reason the scribes and Pharisees faced judgment wasn't because of how they appeared on the outside, but of what they harbored on the inside. They were hypocrites. And we do not want to follow that path.

*Isaiah says our sins separate us from God. Holiness, or purity from sin, allows us to enjoy fellowship with God (1 John 1:6-7) Knowing this, what motivation do we have for living a holy life? What does John tell us is necessary to be cleansed from sin?*

When we grasp the truth that our Holy and Loving God desires a relationship with us, we will desire to cooperate with His Holy Spirit to sanctify us, and through His power pursue a life that pleases God. As we draw closer and spend more time in God's presence, we reflect His heart in the ways Matthew refers to as the more important things like justice, mercy and faith.

## **3. Jesus is Lord**

*2 But some Pharisees saw them do it and protested, "Look, your disciples are breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath." ... 8 For the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!" - Matthew 12:2, 8 NLT*

In Matthew 12 we read an account where the Pharisee's attempted to discredit Jesus by accusing Him and the disciples of breaking the Sabbath Law. A law that was designed to be about freedom from slavery and delight in God had been twisted into another form of slavery; legalism. But Jesus refers